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## CUSTER'S FIGHT AND FORSYTH'S SIEGE BY BUFFALO BILL

FROM "TRUE TALES OF THE PLAINS"  
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**G**ENERAL SHERIDAN, who was in command of the department, was himself in the field. These Indians having perpetrated many outrages, popular indignation seconded and demanded active retribution. The Indians naturally in winter drifted southward if possible, and Sheridan had made a rendezvous at Camp Supply, in Indian Territory, a hundred miles south of Fort Dodge. Believing that they were in camp in concealment somewhere, Sheridan elected to detach Custer and his regiment and send them on a scout, while he himself would seek in another direction, with Camp Supply as a base. On Nov. 23, at 4 o'clock in the morning, in a snowstorm, Custer reported himself ready to march with his usual evidenced anxiety to fight. On the 26th the Canadian river was reached, and Major Elliot was sent on a prospecting tour, while he crossed the river with his immediate command. The ice was not strong enough to bear them up, so they had to break through it in fording the river. After crossing Scout Corbin brought news that Elliot had struck a trail on the south side of the river. This he was sent orders to follow until night and then to wait for Custer and his men. Leaving the wagon train behind him under an escort, abandoning some and taking their pack train of mules, a hundred rounds of ammunition and commissary stores of one day's rations of coffee and hard tack and some forage for his horses, he hastened on. Troop after troop was relieved at the front for breaking the road, and the horses were pushed to the limit of their condition of safety, as the Indians, if they were in as large a number as believed, might ambush Elliot and his men. They reached Elliot at 9 o'clock.

A council was called, and it was decided to wait until the moon rose and then to follow the Indian trail. The rest did the command some good, the saddle girths being loosened and the horses given their scanty supply. With an able disposition of the scouts in advance, Custer led his men, and in about an hour's ride Little Beaver approached and said he smelt fire. A halt, and Custer and the scouts went forward, crawled up over the ridge.

General Forsyth was in command of a body of about fifty plainsmen, enlisted as scouts, and camped beside the Arickaree river, a small stream in northwestern Kansas. The Indians had been reported as uprising, and the expedition was projected for the purpose of finding out the true state of affairs. It being a season when very little water was in the river, the party removed his camp to an island in the middle of the stream. There their worst fears were early realized, for at 9 o'clock on the morning of Sept. 17, 1868, Chief Roman Nose entered the river valley with his braves, squaws and children and prepared for an attack. Roman Nose was a heroic specimen of the Indian warrior, and he headed a party of nearly a thousand hostile braves.



With a cheer the cavalry charged. A little fire smoldering, which the scout said had been used by those guarding the ponies. The main camp was at no great distance.

Whispered commands were given and Cook's sharpshooters dismounted and advanced. The regiment was divided into four squadrons—Major Elliot was to go around on the left and get in the rear of the camp; Thompson, on the right, was to connect with Elliot; Captain Myers on the left, with Custer and four troops in what would be the center. Hoping for no discovery by the foe, Custer was to gauge the time necessary and give the signal to attack with the bugle.

About an hour before dawn Captain Myers' troop took up the last and nearest position. A moment before the general was about to order the charge sounded a rifle shot signal was heard from one of the Indian guards in the camp, and Custer's bugle sounded.

the Indians were again driven off, and for a third time they returned at 4 o'clock to be once more and finally repulsed. The Forsyth party suffered severely in all three of the attacks. All their horses and mules had been killed, thus cutting off their means of escape. Lieutenant Fred Beecher, a nephew of Henry Ward Beecher, the distinguished Brooklyn divine, and five of his men, had also been killed or mortally wounded, and seventeen men, including General Forsyth, had been seriously wounded. Practically only seven men out of the original number were unharmed.

Fort Wallace, the nearest military post, was a hundred miles away, and the situation was indeed desperate for General Forsyth and his men, without food and surrounded by nearly a thousand Indians. The dead horses were cut into strips for food, and a well inside the circular breastworks was dug for water. The defense was further strengthened as best it could be, and, ever watchful, they passed four days with no sign from the Indians save an occasional shot when a scout indiscreetly rose to stretch himself. On the second day the horse meat

could not be eaten. Suffering became intense, and sending for help was absolutely necessary, else the command would perish. Jack Stilwell, a noted scout, then a beardless youth in buckskin, volunteered to go to Fort Wallace. Old Pete Trudeau, a frontiersman, said he would go with him. At midnight the pair crept out from the breastworks and were quickly lost sight of. Stilwell decided that the best route to take would be by going directly ashore and over the bluff and not to detour up or down the river or follow the ravines into the interior, for he judged that the Indians would guard these seemingly less perilous avenues, feeling that no one would take a chance of escaping over the bluff. Crawling on their stomachs and knees, three miles were covered before dawn. They saw Indians on every hand. The first stage of their long journey brought them to the top of the divide between the Arickaree and South Republican rivers. There they concealed themselves for the day in a washout, or head of a draw, where the banks had been overgrown with tall grass and sunflowers. From over the hill they could hear firing all day, which told them that their comrades still held out.

Next night they crept away across the south fork of the Republican, and the morning of the fourth day found them on the prairie at the head of Goose creek. The Indians seemed to have been left behind, and the boy and man decided now to travel also by day. This piece of recklessness nearly cost them their lives, for about 8 o'clock in the morning they saw Indians coming toward them, and they dropped into the grass. Fortunately the Indians had not discovered them, but it was necessary to hide quickly. In looking for a place to conceal themselves on the open plains they discovered some weeds growing around a buffalo carcass. Crawling to their prospective shelter, they found that the buffalo had been killed about a year before and that the skeleton was intact, with little bits of hide hanging to the ribs in places. In a moment they had crawled into the skeleton with its almost unbearable stench. The tenseness of their situation, coupled with the dangers at hand, began to affect Trudeau's mind, and he almost broke down completely. He wanted to shout, shoot his revolver and leap out from their hiding place, but Stilwell persuaded him to remain quiet until dark, when a refreshing drink of water revived him, and they traveled on through the night. The next day was foggy, and they traveled by daylight without trouble. About 11 o'clock, when almost utterly exhausted, they saw coming out of the haze of the Denver wagon road two soldiers bearing dispatches. The carriers were on the way to Colonel Carpenter's command, lying at Lake Slater, about fifty miles from where General Forsyth was besieged. Spurring their horses, they made all haste to Colonel Carpenter's camp, and his force was quickly marched to General Forsyth's relief.

During the next two hours the Forsyth party dug their rifle pits deeper, strengthened their barricades with the bodies of their destroyed horses and protected themselves as best they could against a second attack. At 2 o'clock



They crawled into the buffalo skeleton for refuge.

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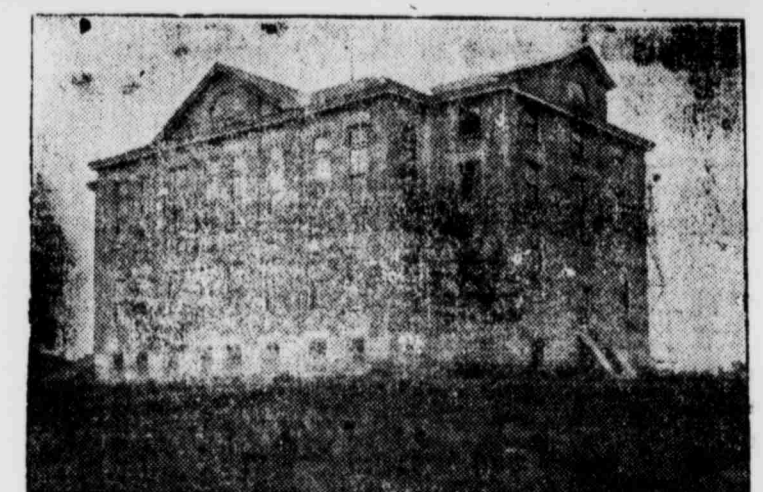
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